Crime and Holy Punishment

In Divided Nigeria, Search for Justice Leads Many to Embrace Islamic Code

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FUNTUA, Nigeria

In the continuing search for justice, comes now Case No. 88/2002: "Theft of Sheep and Ram."

The facts, as outlined in the court files, couldn't be more ordinary.

There was a sheep. There was a ram. They were worth about $30. They were stolen.

The trial, which has just begun, seems unexceptional as well.

"Did you steal them?" asks the judge, who sits at the front of a hot, heavy-aired, cement box of a room whose wall decorations are an out-of-date calendar, a leather bag with a copy of the Koran inside, and a whip.

"Yes," says the first defendant.

"Yes," says the second.

"Yes," says the third.

But what happens next does have significance -- not only to the three defendants, but to Funtua, a town with a history of religious riots, and the state of Katsina, where a woman faces a death sentence for committing adultery, and the nation of Nigeria, where a population nervously split between Muslims and Christians reflects rising religious and ethnic tensions worldwide. It is in this context that the judge reads aloud from Katsina's penal code, which was recently rewritten to conform to the Islamic system of laws called *sharia*.

"Whoever commits the offense of theft," he says, "shall be punished with amputation of the right hand from the joint of the wrist."

He stops reading and glances around a courtroom filled with several dozen onlookers whose deal in life is a ragged town in an impoverished state in a country where nothing ever seems quite right. Even the court records -- handwritten because there are no computers, not to mention working phones or lights -- are amiss. "Eighteen," is the age listed for the youngest defendant, Mohammed Abubakar. "Thirteen," he will whisper later. But for now he folds his hands and sits quietly as the judge announces his sentence.

Convicted of theft in Funtua, Nigeria, Sanusi Isiyaka, 23, received 10 lashes that leave a pattern of long marks across his back. The judge described the punishment as lenient. David Finkel/The Washington Post

"I have decided to be lenient," the judge says, and with that the three are led outside, followed by everyone else in the courtroom who form a ring around a bench where the first of the three, the 13-year-old, is directed to sit.

Take off your shirt, he is told.

Now, sensing what is about to happen, dozens of passersby join the crowd as the last person emerges from the court, a man who has stopped at the wall and taken down the whip.

Crack.

The first lash slices across the left side of the boy's upper back. He arches in surprise as the man swings again.

Crack.

This one, harder, cuts a long mark into the boy's skin.

Crack.

Another slice. The boy, in pain, curls forward.

Crack.

"This is God's justice," one of the onlookers says approvingly.

Crack.

God's justice, then, in "Theft of Sheep and Ram":

"I felt it deep inside my flesh," the boy says after 10 lashes, and swears he will never steal again.

The Degrees of Sharia

In Nigeria, a nominal democracy of 130 million people, they don't just steal sheep. Some people also drink alcohol, engage in prostitution, commit adultery and go outside after midnight.

People dress in short sleeves, too, and ride in taxis that aren't segregated by sex.

And double up on motorbikes, even though that may involve a woman sitting with, touching, holding onto, a man who is not her husband.

For Nigeria's 50 million Christians, there are no criminal penalties for such behavior. But there are penalties for many of its 65 million Muslims, particularly those who live in Nigeria's predominantly Muslim northern states.

This is because of sharia, which, to Muslims, is a God-given code for how a life ought to be lived. Used in varying degrees, for most Muslims it is a guide to such individual activities as prayer, fasting and donating to the poor. Beyond that, many Muslim countries have adopted sharia as their civil law, governing such things as marriage and inheritance. And then there are the countries that use sharia as their criminal law, applying its judgments and penalties to such offenses as theft and adultery, which are known in sharia as Hadd offenses.

While the list of countries that use sharia as their civil law is lengthy, the list of countries that use it to judge Hadd offenses is a much smaller part of the Islamic world. There's Saudi Arabia. There's Iran. There's Sudan. Perhaps most famously, there was Afghanistan under Taliban rule. There are a few other places where criminal sharia is applied regionally, such as in parts of Pakistan. And now there's Nigeria, where Muslims in 12 of the country's 36 states find themselves facing sentences that differ greatly from the sentences handed out to the country's non-Muslims.

Theft? That's amputation of the right hand. Theft a second time? That's amputation of the left foot. An unmarried person who has sex? That's 100 lashes. A person who commits adultery? That's burial up to the waist and being pelted in the head with stones until death.

So far, since the first state implemented criminal sharia three years ago, at least four death sentences have been handed down for adultery, one of which came from a judge named Bawa Tambuwal, who has also sentenced six people to have amputations. "I believe in sharia," he says. "It is ordained by God."

But Nigeria is also home to Christians such as the Rev. Linus Awuhe, a Catholic priest who says, "I, as a Christian, cannot accept sharia" -- and in that divide between Awuhe and Tambuwal is why the introduction of sharia hasn't been without problems.

There have been riots between Christians and Muslims that have left several thousand dead. There is growing concern of a looming constitutional crisis as the pending death-by-stoning cases work their way toward the federal appellate system, bringing guarantees against cruel and unusual punishment in conflict with guarantees that states may enact their own laws. And there is a widening gulf between governors who say they implemented sharia because of divine instruction, and disbelievers who say it was a move by the political elite to tighten power over a population variously described as Nigeria's poorest, most marginalized, most vulnerable to oppression, and most victimized by Nigeria's endless corruption.

Which, of course, is why many of those very Muslims view sharia as a literal answer to their prayers. Not only do they see it as God's word, they say, but what has been their alternative? They live in a country so corrupt that even though Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil producers, there are chronic gasoline shortages and all-day lines. The non-sharia court system? It's a system brought by the British when they took over Nigeria a century ago, which, to the poor, seems to hinge on unaffordable lawyers and judges demanding bribes. Their penal system? Filthy, disease-ridden and overcrowded prisons in which nine out of 10 inmates aren't convicts but people who can spend years waiting for a court date they have been unable to buy their way out of.

By contrast:

"Next case," says Attahir Dan-Ayya, the judge in "Theft of Sheep and Ram," moving on. Speedy trials and instant decisions: that's what justice is in Dan-Ayya's courtroom. Criminal defendants are here because, as Muslims, they have no choice; those in civil cases, who are filling the benches and sitting shoulder to shoulder, are here because they prefer to avail themselves of a judge who relies on two Islamic scholars rather than law books and rockets through a dozen or more cases a day.

A man rises from one of the splintering benches and takes a seat at the front, joined by a woman who enters from a crowded side room, where she has been sitting on the floor. It is a divorce case. Never mind that only men sit in the courtroom and women enter only when their names are called, or that a man can get a divorce simply by saying three times to a woman, "I divorce you," while a woman has to go to court. The point is the woman is getting her chance to be heard without having to hire a lawyer or offer a bribe.

We don't talk, she says, speaking in Hausa, the language here in northern Nigeria. He doesn't eat what I cook, she goes on, and we haven't had sex in weeks.

I have two wives, the man answers, in his defense.

And maybe the judge notices how distraught the woman is when she says in a voice that sounds beaten down, "I don't want to be married to him any longer," but what he's paying attention to is the sight of a man on bended knee, beseeching his wife not to divorce him.

"He loves you very much," the judge says.

"God forgives this man on one knee. You must, too," adds one of the scholars.

Divorce denied.

Next case.

Up to the front comes a man who looks to be in his thirties, and in from the side room comes his wife of three months, who is 13.

He's starving me, she says.

Not true, he says.

We've only had sex once in three months, he says.

Not true, she says, blinking away sudden tears.

Try to reconcile, the judge decides, after consulting with the Islamic scholars. "Every divorce affects Islam," he says, and in this manner the cases go on until court is adjourned, and everyone again goes outside, including the court's criminal prosecutor, who looks across the street at another court in Funtua, the non-sharia court, the court that's never busy these days, and says, "Here is better. There, you can lie. You can play with the judge's intelligence. Here, your religion does not allow you to lie. You must tell the truth."

For Stealing, Your Hand

The truth:

"He confessed," says Bawa Sahabi Tambuwal.

"I gave him an opportunity to withdraw his confession several times, but he declined. I told him the consequences of his actions. I told him he could appeal. I told him he could have a lawyer free of charge."

The judge with the most stoning and amputation sentences since sharia's implementation, Tambuwal can be found in the very northwestern reaches of Nigeria, in the city of Sokoto, which is the capital of Sokoto state. On his docket this day is the case of a 19-year-old defendant named Bello Ali, who is accused of theft and is waiting for his trial to begin. He is in a holding cell, head resting in hands that are unblemished except for a nickel-sized sore on the outer bone of each of the wrists.

Tambuwal will get to him in a moment, but first he wants to finish talking about a man named Umaru Aliyu, who was convicted last year of stealing a sheep.

"He said that as a Muslim, he would submit to the sharia and whatever sentence that was prescribed," Tambuwal says.

"So," he says of what happened next, "the hand was amputated."

He won't say any more -- "I will not disclose how or where" -- except to say that when the hand was severed Aliyu said, "Thank God," and that "when I watched the procedure, I remembered what thieves do. The way they break into people's houses. Attack them. Kill them sometimes. I felt this is exactly what they deserve."

And one more thing. Because of the amputation, he says, Aliyu, upon death, can go to paradise -- but not with the hand. "The hand will go to hell," he says.

He heads into his courtroom. He listens as a policeman swears to tell "the truth before God" and outlines the case against Bello Ali: that three people broke into a house late one night and stole a 14-inch TV and a suitcase stuffed with clothing, that as they ran off they were spotted by a tailor who was working late, that a friend of the tailor's gave chase, that they dropped the TV and suitcase and scattered, that two escaped, that Ali was discovered soon after lying low in a car, that the police told Ali anything he said could be used against him as evidence and that Ali signed a confession in which he wrote, "I'm in position of a good leather whipping. Such is life."

Next, Tambuwal asks to see the evidence, and when the suitcase is opened, the courtroom is suddenly filled with the powdery smell of children's clothing, a reminder that, as Tambuwal said, thieves do break into houses, houses that are homes, homes where children wear freshly laundered clothing while watching 14-inch TVs.

Next, Tambuwal asks Ali, who is acting as his own lawyer, if he has anything to say, and Ali asks the policeman for the names of the people who found him in the car. "You don't have to know," the policeman responds. He then tries another question, something about the location of the car being a mile away from where the people who found him said it was. But Tambuwal says, "Where you were arrested is not on point," adjourns the case for the day and instructs Ali to be taken back to the holding cell.

Back he goes.

Where, out of earshot of the judge, he says that he didn't do it, that he was asleep in his father's car when he was suddenly dragged out, that "the police beat me up so I would confess."

He holds out his hands and exposes his wrists. This is the spot, of course, where an amputation would occur -- but Ali's point is the sores.

"They hung me up using ropes."

Now he turns around, lifts his shirt, and shows a back striped with long, black marks.

"They used sticks on me."

He lowers the shirt and tries to explain why he didn't bring this up in court.

"If justice is done, I will be released," he says, but "whatever the court decides under sharia, I will accept it."

Even amputation?

He shrugs. He is a Muslim, he says. He believes in God. He believes in destiny. And, like most people, he doesn't know much about amputation -- not the law, not the procedure, and not what happened to Umaru Aliyu -- largely because the few people who do know about it have agreed not to say anything. Abubakar Sanyinna, Sokoto's attorney general, will only say that Aliyu was given anesthesia, that the amputation was done as a surgical procedure by a doctor named Shehu, that when Aliyu awakened he seemed somewhat unhappy, and that the removed hand was put in a refrigerator.

A surgeon at Specialist Hospital named Shehu Bello, while not confirming that he performed the procedure, says of why he would: "As a Muslim, whatever your profession, whatever your work, your religion comes first, and that is the meaning of sharia." As to how he would do an amputation, he will only say, "In Islam, in any punishment, you're expected to show leniency in mode and manner."

As to what leniency means specifically, he won't say. Neither will Sanyinna and Tambuwal, both of whom watched. As for Aliyu, they will only say that after his release from the hospital, he likely went back to his home in a village called Jamwake, forever to be a chastened advertisement about the consequences of thievery.

In Jamwake, however, which is a few dozen mud huts on a dirt road in southern Sokoto, the men of the village, gathered under a shade tree, say that, yes, Aliyu returned but soon realized he was being shunned and so slinked away to another village, called Gidankare.

In Gidankare, same story. Gone. "Because of the shame," says a relative, Hantsi Umaru. "He was never angry," Umaru says of Aliyu's reaction to the amputation. "It was from God. He took it in good faith." Nonetheless, he says, "he was isolated from society," and he departed for a village called Gigane, in northern Sokoto, almost at the border between Nigeria and Niger.

Except he's not in Gigane, either.

Try Sakamaru, people say.

Sakamaru, then -- where Isa Kwama, the village's Islamic scholar, who is blind from cataracts and sitting under a tree on an animal skin, says of Aliyu: "When he was a small boy, his father brought him here from Niger to learn to read the Koran." Three decades later, he says, Aliyu came again, this time missing a hand. He kept to himself, said little, stayed a few months, and then, not long ago, alone, left Sakamaru, left Sokoto, left Nigeria and went back to Niger.

Why?

"He didn't say," says Kwama, who is surrounded by people from the village. Did he say anything about what had happened to him?

There is a boy who has a piece of sugar cane in his right hand. There is a woman who is using her right hand to balance a sack of grain on her head.

"No," Kwama says.

What happens when the hand is lost because of sharia? he is asked. Can the person be accepted by other Muslims? Can he live a good life? Can he go to paradise after his death?

There is a man using his right hand to wipe sweat off his forehead, and a man using his to swat at mosquitoes, and a girl using hers to hold the left hand of her friend.

"Yes," Kwama says.

What about the hand? he is asked. What happens to it? Will it be reattached to Aliyu in paradise? Does it go by itself to hell?

A boy twirls a stick. A woman adjusts her head covering. A boy pets the ear of a donkey.

And Kwama points a finger.

"Man cannot know what God is going to do with a hand," he says.

Enforcers on the Street

In the city of Gusau, which is the capital of Zamfara state, which is where sharia is at its severest, what some men do is causing others to grab machetes and sticks.

"For our own protection," one says. "In case of thieves."

They are vigilantes, officially sanctioned to help enforce sharia. This particular night brings out 50 of them, members of such groups as The Legion, Man O' War, and Civil Defense. They have the power to detain and permission to carry pretty much any weapon other than a gun. Every night -- "even in the rainy season," one says -- they gather at 10 o'clock outside the police station. By 10:15 they are aligned in groups of five, by 10:30 they are on their way by foot and car to scattered points around the city, and by 11 they are ready to start patrols that will last until daybreak.

This has been going on for nearly three years, since Zamfara became the first Nigerian state to implement criminal sharia. Before then, as officials describe it, the streets of Gusau were infested with brothels, gambling parlors and bars. Two amputations and a thousand nights of vigilantism later, wherever the prostitutes, gamblers and drunks are, they aren't clogging the streets of Gusau. Instead, the symbols of Gusau and Zamfara are Ahmed Sani, the governor, whose decision to establish sharia has brought him national prominence, and Buba Bello Kare, Nigeria's first sharia amputee, once a two-handed

cattle thief and now an asymmetrical portrait of redemption, who tells visitors, "When I regained consciousness, I felt I was one of the happiest people on earth."

The schools in Zamfara are now segregated by sex. The taxis are, too. Buses aren't, but men and women sit separately, with women confined to the rear because, as a sharia advocate named Abubakar Mujahid explains, "If you put women behind, you free men from looking at them." As for motorbikes, the most popular way for people to get around this poor place, men and women who aren't related can no longer ride together because if they did "a woman would be touching another man's back."

Mujahid is the leader of one of the largest radical Islamic groups in Nigeria, called Jaamutu Tajidmul Islami, or the Movement for Islamic Revival. A student of Nigerian history, he is well aware that the implementation of criminal sharia, which had existed in Nigeria before it was interrupted by British rule, "is not a sudden occurrence. It is something that has been boiling up." Particularly important, he says, was the 1979 Iranian revolution that led to the rise of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. "We figured if Iran can do it, why not here?"

A generation later, the student revolutionaries of 1979 are now some of the people in power in Nigeria's predominantly Muslim states, and while "the sharia implementation has just started," says Mujahid, "the ultimate is to have an Islamic state, where we are not bound by the West." By "West," he means the United States, which he describes as "arrogant" and "a symbol of injustice in the world."

"What is the difference between justice in democracy and justice in Islam?" he says. "The answer is justice in democracy is because the people want it, it's the mandate of the people, but justice in Islam is that the people feel the creator, Allah, wants it. We are doing it because we are feeling this is what the creator wants us to do. In democracy, the interpretation of justice can be adapted. In Islam, it cannot."

Not everyone in Zamfara agrees with Mujahid. "Sharia is a religious law, an Islamic law, but it is not a Christian law," says Linus Awuhe, explaining one reason he opposes sharia's implementation. In addition to being a priest, Awuhe is the Zamfara chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria. "I am not saying they're not entitled to their beliefs. What I am saying is they should not force their beliefs on me.

"Secondly," he continues, "the manner in which the sharia law is implemented goes against my own fundamental human rights. When you talk of the issue of sin and punishment, you don't amputate a sinner, you don't stone a person to death, you bring a person about by grace."

And third, he says, "Let me tell you that sharia will not achieve justice, not in Nigeria, because the Nigerian is still the Nigerian. Nigeria needs to be renovated from within. In the past, sharia was used in the north to harass political opponents, to oppress them. Today, too, sharia is being used by the elite to oppress the masses. It is the masses who will suffer, not the elite.

"Tell me, how many hands of officials have been amputated?" he goes on. "These people are looting the economy. How many of *their* hands have been amputated? They are amputating the hands of petty thieves, who do what they do because of social disorder. There are no good roads. The educational system is collapsing. Health care is zero. There is a great poverty in this land. The people are made to live miserable lives. So how can someone bring in a system of justice when that justice doesn't apply to him, who sends his children to school out of country? Who drives the road in a heavy jeep? Who lives in air conditioning? Who doesn't queue up for fuel? Who goes to Germany for health care? And above all uses his pen to rob the country? And who is amputating his hand?"

Mujahid, though, says that people who would agree with Awuhe are missing the point. Under sharia, he says, embezzlement falls under the category of breach of trust, not theft, so amputation wouldn't apply. As for stoning, he says, it is ordained, which is argument enough, but a secondary argument concerns the lessons he learned when Nigeria was still under military rule and he spent nearly two years in detention for his political views. Who else was in prison? Men whose mothers were prostitutes, men whose fathers had abandoned them, men who had grown up with no parents. "So this is an angle," he says. By stoning to death an adulterer, "you stop him from committing adultery. If he lives, he goes on to commit many many more adulteries, and those result in children being born who grow up and become drunks or armed robbers who kill people." Clearly, what Nigeria needs isn't less, sharia, he says, but more.

His goal? "Justice," he says.

His model? The Taliban. "There are one or two things I have an argument with, but generally I think they did very, very good."

His proof that sharia works? "Look around," he says.

10:30 p.m.: All over Gusau, market stalls are open, and people are walking around streets lit by oil lanterns. "We give people till 11:30 to shut down," one of the vigilantes says, adding that after midnight they can be arrested on a charge called Late Hour.

11:30: Most of the stalls are closed, most of the lanterns are out.

11:45: Streets are quiet. Dark. Soundless. Empty.

11:54: Here comes a car with one headlight and a squeaky fan belt, lit up suddenly by a vigilante's flashlight.

11:56: The only sound is of a metal door being slammed shut and locked.

11:57: Another car, pulling to a stop. A man runs from it and disappears inside a house.

11:59: Nothing.

Midnight: "Time for people to sleep," says one of the vigilantes, and off they go on patrol -- past dark houses and closed doors, past what was the city's one movie theater and is now the Ministry for Religious Affairs Islamic Center, past stray dogs and no prostitutes and no drunks and, if it ever comes to that, no shortage of rocks -- through streets given over to 50 men with machetes and sticks.

For Adultery, Your Life

Once, when a 32-year-old man named Ahmadu Ibrahim was 16, he got in a fight with a friend, who threw a rock at his head. "Blood gushed," Ibrahim says. "I cried."

So he knows what it's like to be hit by a rock.

"But there's no way to compare it to sharia," he says, "because with sharia they will keep throwing and throwing until I am dead."

Somewhere in the world are people who know what Ibrahim will go through if the sentence he received for adultery is carried out. The rocks are supposed to be fist-sized. The face is an acceptable target. And the head, according to some accounts, keeps snapping back until, if it hasn't caved in, it is knocked free of the body.

In Nigeria, though, no one knows firsthand what happens, not yet. The only execution since sharia began was of a murderer, who, despite the judge's suggestion that he be stabbed to death with the knife he used on his victim, was hanged.

The first person to be sentenced to death for adultery was Safiya Hussaini, of Sokoto, whose sentence was eventually overturned on a technicality.

The second was Amina Lawal, of Katsina state, who is in hiding while her case is being appealed.

The third was a woman named Fatima Usman, of Niger state, who one day said, "I like you," to a man who was not her husband.

And the fourth was Ahmadu Ibrahim, who remembers replying to this woman who wasn't his wife, "I like you, too."

And maybe what happened between them could have been handled as two ordinary divorce cases. But in Nigeria, where nothing is ordinary, what did happen can best be summed up by Hauwa Ibrahim, a defense lawyer involved in all of the stoning cases, who says, "Justice can mean 100 things to 100 people in Nigeria."

Meaning that Fatima Usman's version has so far included a pregnancy, a divorce, and the birth of a girl who would eventually fall ill and die. And her husband's version included saying "I divorce you" three times and demanding back the dowry he'd paid of 10,000

naira (about $40). And so it escalated, version by version. Fatima's father demanded the 10,000 naira from Ahmadu Ibrahim, who could only come up with 5,000, which led them to court, where the judge let it be known that he wanted a bribe, which Fatima's father said he paid, only to have the judge announce that he was fining Fatima and Ahmadu 15,000 naira apiece for having sex and that if they couldn't pay they would go to prison for five years. Off they went to prison, which caused Fatima's father to beg the court to reconsider, which it did, saying the sentence was indeed wrong, that the court was now a sharia court and under sharia both should have been sentenced to death.

So, in absentia, they were sentenced to death.

And two months later, Fatima's father, beside himself, is saying, "I never thought it would degenerate to this."

And Ahmadu's wife, who sold her sewing machine, the family's motorbike and most of their clothing while Ahmadu was in prison, is wondering what can be sold next so she'll have enough money to feed their children.

And Ahmadu, just freed on bail, is at his lawyer's office, describing what prison had been like.

Seventy-three days. That's how long he was in. "Hunger," he says of the first 72. "Hot." His bed was the floor, his blanket "was full of lice," the toilet was a bucket shared by 70 men. Then came Day 73. He was taken to the prison office. "I thought maybe my family had come to see me," he says. Instead, there was the warden, and Fatima, and a lawyer, and a friend of theirs who told them that they had been granted bail and then broke the news that they had been resentenced, in absentia, to be stoned.

"I groaned," Ahmadu says, continuing to describe what happened.

And Fatima? "She just kept quiet," he says, while the warden said to them, "When you get home, continue to pray to God so that God will forgive you. I wish you the best."

And with that they were released.

Outside: "Give me 10 naira to buy some peanuts," Ahmadu, dazed, said to Fatima as they waited for the car.

"I don't have any change," she said.

That was all they said to each other. They got in the car and rode in silence back to their village. Ahmadu got out. Fatima remained in her seat and was driven away by the lawyer. Ahmadu watched the car until it disappeared, went to his home where his wife told him she had sold most of their clothes, then walked to his farm where he saw that everything was dead, and broke down.

Sharia in Nigeria:

"Yes, it's God's law," Ahmadu says, "and I believe in it, but the way it is implemented. . . ." He trails off.

"I need help," he says.

He gets up. Time to go home.

Amina Lawal, carrying her 10-month-old daughter Wasila, has been sentenced to death by stoning by a sharia court for committing adultery. David Finkel/The Washington Post

First, though, there's someone his lawyer asks him to meet. He is given an address, which brings him to a gate with a bell. He waits until the gate swings open and enters the hiding place of Amina Lawal.

Amina Lawal, who was sentenced to death soon after she gave birth, while the man she swore on the Koran impregnated her was freed because there weren't the required four eyewitnesses to testify they'd seen him having sex.

Who can't remember how old she was when she first married but knows it was before her first period.

Who is now 31, twice married, twice divorced and the mother of three, including 10-month-old Wasila, the proof of her guilt.

Who is to face the stones next fall, once Wasila is no longer breastfeeding.

Who is Nigeria's most infamous adulterer, and who now says to Ahmadu, "Congratulations on your release."

"Thank you," he says.

They look at each other. They are a man and a woman. Unmarried to each other. Alone in the land of sharia.

"May God make us be free," she says, bowing her head in prayer.

Ahmadu bows his head as well. "Amen."